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Writing an accounting or business history: Notes toward a methodology

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WRITING AN ACCOUNTING OR BUSINESS HISTORY: NOTES TOWARD A METHODOLOGY

Abstract: Historical research in accounting and business includes many subject areas, including the writing of histories of accounting and business firms. Each subject area of historical research must be undertaken by utilizing appropriate research methodology. In this article, a research methodology is presented to assist those interested in writing an accounting or business history.

Of all kinds of writing, that of preparing an accounting or business history is the one, in the opinion of the authors, that requires the most patience, fortitude, and attention to detail. Moreover, it is the one that historians often avoid because it has the potential of introducing between the writer and subject a bureaucratic barrier that unless approached skillfully and diplomatically can scuttle the best intentions of the best historian.

A number of histories of accounting and business firms have been written. Examples would be Arthur Andersen & Co.'s [1974] *The First Sixty Years, 1913-1973*, Jones's [1981] *Accountancy and the British Economy 1840-1980: The Evolution of Ernst & Whinney*, Wise's [1982] *Peat, Marwick, Mitchell & Co.: 85 Years*, Swanson's [1972] *Touche Ross: A Biography*, and Robert's [1983] *ETHYL: A History of the Corporation and the People Who Made It.*

Basically there are two categories of accounting and business histories. The first and least complex are those that center on companies that no longer exist and whose executives and employees are deceased. The writer's task in preparing histories such as these revolves primarily around gathering extant data, including peripheral materials of how the company interfaced with other businesses of the time. Next the job is to assimilate these data, arrive at conclusions concerning the company, and

prepare a manuscript that tells the story of the company. Points to be covered, among others, would be its relevance to the era in which it existed, *what the contemporary reader can learn from knowing how that company functioned*[1] and what kind of society it reflects.

For accounting and business histories of this kind, where the business is defunct and those connected with it are deceased, the writer does not have the burden of concern with personalities. To be sure, the men and women who guided the company will need to be characterized, but in the event that one of them, say, exerted a negative influence on the business, the writer is at liberty to write about the person's inadequacies with impunity. In short, the writer is free to interpret the company and those who ran it without being held accountable to living people who could influence the final written product (editors and publishers are, of course, the exception).

The majority of accounting and business histories, however, will be of a second kind. These are the ones that center on the contemporary business world. In histories such as these, the writer will be dealing with companies that have prospered with each consecutive managing partner, president, and CEO, as well as other strong company leaders, making his or her contribution to the success of the firm. These are the kinds of histories that lead writers to evaluate performances and assess the importance of people's contributions, in short, to second-guess those who were involved in the day-to-day operation of their companies, while the writer was, of course, not a participant.[2]

It is the histories from this latter category that prove most problematical for the accounting and business historian. Needless to say, there are countless unpublished histories in countless businesses' archives that are destined not to see print because some individual or group could not tolerate either making sensitive matters public or having people's personal lives put on display. More importantly, such histories often remain unpub-

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[1] Editor's Note: This is a key point.

[2] The discussion in this manuscript is from the perspective of the author of the accounting or business history being a non-participant in the operations of the company. However, accounting and business histories may be recollections by the author such as Carey's [1969-1970] two volumes on *The Rise of the Accounting Profession*, Olson's [1982] *The Accounting Profession—Years of Trial: 1969-1980*, and Moonitz's [1986] *History of Accounting at Berkeley* [Previts, *et al.*, 1990].

lished because the historian and key personnel did not see eye to eye when envisioning what a given company was or what it became. It is these histories, and how they can be researched and written, that are the focus of this paper.[3]

TWO CAN BE A CROWD: JOINT AUTHORSHIP

Anyone scanning library holdings inevitably turns up works produced through joint authorship. The findings of a recent study by Urbancic [1992, p. 49] suggest that currently the majority of scholarly accounting research is co-authored. The different viewpoints and expertise of co-authorship tend to improve the quality of the research [Urbancic, 1992]. There can, however, be problems; and anyone contemplating writing an accounting or business history should be cautious in entering into a project with another writer.

In selecting a co-author, "flexibility," "trust," and "honesty," are the working words. It is imperative that writers working together be able to put egos aside and listen to each other's observations. If one tries to dominate the other, friction will surface. Moreover, if two writers enter a hastily conceived joint proposal without coming to an understanding of what is to be done and how it should be done, they are probably in for future trouble. Think about how you as authors will interact when questions have to be answered and problems, many of which will not surface until the project is underway, have to be solved. When contemplating a joint-authorship project it is safe to assume that any shortcomings, inadequacies, or personality prob-

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[3] The research methodology presented in this paper is discussed from the perspective of writing a history of an accounting or business firm. However, much of the methodology presented would be applicable to writing histories of professional accounting organizations such as Zeff's [1966] *American Accounting Association: Its First 50 Years, 1916-1966*, Flesher's [1991] *Third-Quarter Century of the American Accounting Association, 1966-1991*, Flesher's [1991] *The Institute of Internal Auditors: Fifty Years of Progress Through Sharing*, Coffman, Roberts, and Previts's [1989] "A History of the Academy of Accounting Historians, 1973-1988," Vangermeersch's [1980] *75th Anniversary: Rhode Island Society of CPAs, Founded in 1905*, Davis's *Certified Public Accountants in Mississippi, 1904-1977*, and Bishop and Wingfield's [1984] "The Virginia Society of Certified Public Accountants, The First Seventy-Five Years: 1909-1984." Some tips on writing a state society history are presented by R. Vangermeersch in "Tips for Writing a History of a State Society of CPAs," *Accounting Historians Notebook* (Spring 1982), pp. 1, 16.

lems in a prospective collaborator are sure to be magnified as the project progresses. On the other hand, if you locate someone with whom you feel totally comfortable and whom you totally trust, the collaboration might well produce a better history than you could if working alone.

EARLY MEETING OF MINDS BETWEEN COMPANY AND WRITER A NECESSITY

It is essential that a historian preparing to write an accounting or business history be compatible with and have a rudimentary knowledge of the subject he or she is preparing to write about. If there is a fundamental difference between the historian's outlook and the goals of the company, it is unlikely that a satisfactory manuscript will emerge from the labor.

The prospective historian of an accounting or business history would be well served to have a *grass roots overview* of the company in question: know something about the company before undertaking the task of researching and writing about it. Such an observation might sound parochial, but in the long run if the historian is compatible with those who run the accounting firm or business and if the historian knows how the company works, he or she will find that those in the business will be more willing to cooperate. Business people are neither historians, writers, or scholars, but they can be brought into the process if the historian exhibits a knowledge of what it is they do. Important to remember also is that good business history will rest in large part on myriad interviews. If the historian can bring to interview sessions a grass roots knowledge of the firm, conducting the interviews will be easier.

PRELIMINARIES

One way to gain the trust of management, without whose cooperation and approbation an accounting or business history is doomed, is to build into early negotiations escape routes that can be taken by either party, but only up to a certain point in the project. No matter whether the history is being written for pay or the scholarly contribution the historian hopes to make to the profession, it is wise to have a contract that will free either party should the necessity arise. It is wise also to set a timetable, based on chronology or progress, for review of work completed. Such a schedule might be set so that either party can

terminate the project following review of the outline, comple-
tion of the first few chapters, or other convenient divisions in
the project.

There must be a point, however, where neither the historian
nor company officials can end the project without penalty. This
is no more than good business practice, one that forces all con-
cerned to make decisions based on observable data before an
inordinate amount of time and money have been expended. Ide-
ally, that termination point should be reached after the histo-
rian has been given access to company papers and archives and
has had the opportunity to evaluate them and commit himself
or herself in prose to at least a rudimentary interpretation of
them. By this time, the historian will know whether he or she
has the desire to continue the project. In like manner, the com-
pany will know whether it can work with this person.

ESTABLISHING A METHODOLOGY

Depending on the size of the company, there are materials
to which the historian must be given access. Also the historian
should have in the organization a liaison person who is commit-
ted to spend the necessary time to see that the historian is
routed to the proper offices and people for information and
interviews. Materials to be collected, which the company should
allow to remain in the keeping of the historian during the time
the project is in progress, include: annual reports; responses to
APB, AICPA, and FASB exposure drafts; minutes from key com-
mittees; full press runs of all company promotional, explana-
tory, and advertising materials; full press runs of company
house organs; informational documents sent to employees;
press releases to local, regional, and national media; press sto-
ries that relate to the company; files of labor negotiations, if
relevant; copies of obituaries of former company members; cop-
ies of newspaper feature or news stories centering on employ-
ees; copies of speeches given by officials; and copies of any
court decisions involving the company. The historian should
also have access to personnel files, although this point can often
be a sensitive one that may have to be negotiated. The historian
should be legally responsible for such documents, and should be
prepared to relinquish them periodically when they may be
needed by the company. It may be a good idea for the historian
to be bonded by the company during the period that the project
is in progress.

In situations where the company's internal records are poorly stored, have been lost in transit, or destroyed due to fire or selective retention programs, the historian should seek out *buffs* (employees who save every company document and in-house publication) and collectors (employees who keep copies of their correspondence at home) [Bennett, 1988; also Previts, *et al.*, 1990].

After the above materials have been collected, the task is to read those documents that will give the writer an overview of the business. Company publications aimed at employees and the public are usually good places to start. This should be fol-lowed by reading clipping files, if they exist, that center on what has been written in the media about the company. Annual re-ports are next to be looked at as they will give the writer an overview of such things as: cash flow, earnings, major board decisions, and changes in accounting principles.

As the reading progresses, questions will arise. They should be recorded, to be answered with the company liaison person. It is a good idea to tape sessions such as these because informa-tion that can lead to ideas the historian might not have thought about could otherwise be lost.

By the time the writer has completed the foregoing, he or she has a wealth of information about the company, albeit most of it of a general nature. By this time also, the writer should make it a point to meet as many company personnel, from all levels of company ranks, as possible in order to come to some understanding about how people relate to their jobs, their supe-riors and subordinates, their colleagues, and the firm at large. At this point, the historian might also consider checking local newspapers in the area in which the firm is located. Many pa-pers have myriad clippings in their libraries and are willing to make them available for a nominal copying fee. Barring the existence of such files, one might have to resort to the time consuming, but often rewarding task of reading through press runs of the newspapers on microfilm. Such materials are avail-able in area libraries, state libraries, or the Library of Congress. For example, obituaries of company personnel often yield more that facts about the deceased. It is surprising how many dates, events, and leads to other sources often turn up in them.

At this point, the historian might consider making contact with present or past business editors of local newspapers. Often these people, who cover a business beat on a day-to-day basis,

have information they are willing to share. Any interview should be taped, providing the subject is willing.

The next thing to be done is to work with the liaison person in order to learn how departments are organized, what company committees handle what kinds of problems, how various programs such as profit sharing arrangements for partners, stock options for employees, and retirement benefits, for example, are handled. Each business will have its own internal structure; therefore the researcher will have to make his or her own list of topics to be covered.

ENLARGING THE AREA OF COVERAGE

If all has gone well to this point, the historian will have accomplished a great deal. He or she has by now a good knowledge of the business, has gained the confidence of people in the company, and has learned the strengths and weaknesses of the liaison person with whom he or she is working. By now, it also has become apparent how important and how valuable the liaison person is. The willingness of that person to work with the historian can make or break the project, and this is the point at which the historian should know if a change needs to be made. A frank discussion of needs and expectations might take place now.

If the company's history goes back a number of decades, the historian might want to pause at this stage and make an effort to interview retired company employees; the longer the historian waits, the fewer of them will be living. Probably all retirees cannot be interviewed, but the historian should make every effort to talk with those who worked at all levels in the business. Former partners and executives as well as rank-and-file employees will have, by retirement time, gained an objectivity that perhaps they formerly did not have. Moreover, because they are in retirement, many of them may be anxious to be involved again. Often too they have information and will be willing to grant interviews about the company as they remember it. Sometimes they will have scrapbooks, itineraries, newspaper stories, or personal papers they are willing to share. The historian should also keep in mind that people who worked in minor positions will often make observations that will dovetail with those a higher-level person makes in a different interview. Taken together, such information helps in building a final three-dimensional picture.

GETTING THE INTERVIEWS UNDERWAY

Care should be given to preparing questions to be asked, and as far as possible each subject should be asked the same questions, because, through this method, themes and trends that can be used in the finished product begin to emerge.

Interviewers sometimes press their subjects too hard, demanding answers to all questions. This may make for sound bites on the six o'clock news, but for the person writing business or accounting history it may serve to alienate. Interviewers working on projects such as those discussed in this paper should be considerate, if not always completely accommodating. If the subject asks that the tape recorder be turned off while he or she tells a confidential or controversial story, the interviewer will get better cooperation later on and perhaps more consequential answers if the request is granted.

Because most interviews of the kinds discussed here will usually run into numerous sessions, subjects will become more candid if they think the interviewer is not trying to pin them down or trick them. As this confidence grows, comments that the subject refused to make early on will often be forthcoming. Often, especially when interviewing senior members of a company, interviews of five hundred pages or more are not unusual. When the time comes to prepare a rough draft such interviews are indispensable.

ASK THE SAME THING AGAIN AND AGAIN . . . AND MAYBE AGAIN

A useful format for the interviews might be as follows: First, ask the person's name, place and date of birth, education, and the date he or she joined the company. Second, have the person detail each job held since joining the company, with particular explanations of any technical aspects of the job. Third, ask the interviewee to characterize each major person with whom he or she has worked in the company. (Often observations will conflict between persons. The historian will have to sort this out later.)

If all interviews cover identical ground, however, there would be a tiring sameness in materials gathered; and that sameness would manifest itself in the finished manuscript. For this reason, the historian must elicit from each interviewee his or her unique views of the company. With this in mind, the

historian would do well to confer with the liaison person before the interview in an attempt to find out something of the personality of the person to be interviewed: Is the person easy to get along with? Does he or she have a sense of humor? Is he or she shy or outgoing? Does he or she have a distinct way of dealing with people? Does he or she have one personality at the office and another away from the office? Is the person modest or garrulous about personal contributions to the company?

In the final stages of the interview, each person interviewed might be asked two questions: What is the worst thing that ever happened to you during your tenure with the company and what is the best thing? These two questions often elicit candid remarks that give useful information.

A WORD ON INTERVIEWING TECHNIQUES

A few years ago, oral history as a method of recording the past made its presence felt. Although oral history has not been used extensively in accounting history [Collins and Bloom, 1990], there is evidence that its use is receiving more attention. In 1986, Leonard Spacek received the prestigious *Hourglass Award* of Accounting Historians for his book and videotape entitled, *The Growth of Arthur Andersen & Co., 1928-1973, An Oral History*. The oral interview with Spacek was captured on nine hours of videotape [*Accounting Historians Notebook*, 1986, p. 10]. Oral history is a valuable research tool[4] in writing accounting and business histories. However, the interviewer should bear in mind that it is easy to intimidate people by sticking a microphone in their faces, or slipping out a tape recorder and placing it on a desk or a coffee table in someone's home. Far more effective is to make contact with the subject in advance, tell him or her what is being requested and supply information about the need to record the session(s). It is also a good idea to supply, also in advance, a written list of the ground to be covered and the questions to be asked. There will be time enough later, providing the interview goes well, to relax and become spontaneous.

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[4] For discussions on the advantages of oral histories, and the process of gathering oral history, see M. Collins and R. Bloom, "A Primer on Oral History," *Accounting Historians Notebook* (Spring 1990), pp. 32-33.

ON TRANSCRIBING INTERVIEWS:
BAD GRAMMAR IS GOOD

Before interviewing begins, arrangements should be made to have someone transcribe them. The same transcriber should be used throughout the project in order that all interviews be uniform. Also, it is important that the transcriber be given instructions to transcribe all conversations verbatim. The transcriber must avoid the temptation to "clean up" subjects' language and grammar. Business histories can be dull, and sometimes a few lively candid words used in appropriate settings can add needed candor or levity. If the historian decides he or she wants a more formal approach, a later decision to regularize grammar and edit out colorful language can be made. By having the transcriber adhere to the felicity of the words in each interview, the writer has the option of deciding how best to use them.

ORGANIZING THE INTERVIEWS

When the interviewing process is complete—and there could be as many as two hundred or more—some order must be imposed on them so that in the writing stage the historian can locate data quickly. The most effective way is for the historian to read each interview and index each according to events, personalities, important facts, and important decisions that affected the company. Interviews should be filed according to last name, but the indices should be kept separate for reference.

WRITING: DID SHE OR DIDN'T HE?

When the historian has reached this stage, two or more years may have elapsed. By now he or she knows the company, its personnel, the way it conducts business, its strengths and weaknesses, where it has succeeded and failed, who the major players have been, and the like. It is now time to put words on paper.

Although it is not necessary to write the history in chronological order, the best way to get the bulk of collected material in hand is to prepare a chapter-by-chapter outline. Careful thought and planning should go into this phase of the project, consulting the myriad sources collected. Any standard writing text can be consulted for the best way to set up outlines, but in any case a great deal of time and effort should be expended

here, with details of the history being worked out before the writing is undertaken.

When the outline is complete, the historian may wish to submit it to the liaison person for evaluation, or he or she may decide to wait until a later time, when sample writings have been completed. In any event, the decision of how to proceed at this point should be a joint one, made by the historian and liaison person and others in the company who have become involved in the project.

Now comes the difficult part: how to accurately interpret data. It goes without saying that an accounting or business history is just that—the history of a company. It must contain such things as facts, figures, trends, company decisions, committee decisions, annual growth, and profits and losses. Data for this part of the history will come from several places, most of which are listed early in this article. A great deal of such data are also to be found in the interviews.

Provided that the writer has been careful in preparing indices to the interviews, large sections of them can often be turned from first person responses to third person prose explanations of varied aspects of the business. For example, if several people were involved in an action or decision and relay this to the interviewer, their interviews could serve as a third person description of that action or decision. As verbal reinforcements for these sections, pertinent quotations taken from the interviews can also be used. Newspaper clippings and committee minute books also come into play here as the historian weaves a verbal tapestry from a multitude of disparate sources.

However, an accounting or business history is more than the retelling of events, trends, and the recitation of figures: it is a history of the people who made the business. The historian must be accurate, but also be fair when dealing with persons who played key roles in the organization. This is where the typed interviews again play a role. Suppose, for example, that the historian must characterize a life-long employee, now deceased, who built up the foreign operations of the company. If all those interviewed say that the person was kind, generous, firm, affable to work with, and considerate of others, the task is an easy one: There is a consensus and the historian has little more to do than reflect that consensus in the manuscript. Suppose, on the other hand, that the executive in question was viewed differently by different people who were interviewed.

Some say that the person was indeed an excellent business person, one who moved the company onto the international stage, who doubled profits, was a good husband or wife, and a faithful church member, and was attentive to the needs of his or her family. Others, however, might report that although such observations are accurate and that the person was good for the company, he or she would have been better without the irascible, mercurial, temperament coupled with a tendency to berate subordinates. Moreover, the person had a drinking problem, kept hidden from associates, that may have impaired his or her efficiency. How does the historian deal with these data?

First, one might answer "carefully," but there is more to it than that. The historian needs to keep in mind that the task in which he or she is engaged is writing a history of a company, and unless a person's personal life influenced business decisions, and such can be proven, personal lives are not the subject of the study at hand. If they did affect decisions, they should be handled as objectively as possible, perhaps buttressing generalities with quotations, which need not necessarily be attributed by name, from the interviews.

HUMOR CAN BE FUNNY . . . IF

If the historian is not careful, he or she can turn out a finished product so pedestrian that few, other than those in the organization, will want to read it. One way to avoid this is by careful and judicious use of humor. For example, Flesher's AAA history used several humorous anecdotes in the section on annual meetings. [Flesher, 1991, pp. 47-57]. When preparing the indices from the interviews, discussed above, the historian might have a separate category for humor. It is surprising how many funny stories, many of which can be used, will surface; but there are a few rules that must be observed.

No humor based on anti-social, racial, ethnic, sexual, linguistic, religious, or physical characteristics should be used. Nor should incidents that reflect contempt for the law or the general well being of society. That is not to say, however, that such humor cannot be rewritten in order to remove such negative connotations. Amusing stories that reflect on executive decisions, working conditions, problems of auditors or salespeople on the road, in short all the little things that make up the day-to-day routine of businesses, can provide moments of levity if judiciously handled.

REWRITING: WHO SHOULD HELP?

In the world of journalism, there is a rule that the subject of a story should not be allowed to see that story and thus influence its content or direction before it is published. The intent of the rule is that objectivity is of prime importance and should not be compromised. Does such a rule apply to an accounting or business history? The question evokes an equivocal answer: *yes* and *no*. This problem will be a major one with which the writer must deal.

Ultimately, the writer must make up his or her own mind how much the integrity of the manuscript might suffer if major rewriting is allowed. There are, however, some observations that should be made concerning how much those in the organization can aid the writer.

First, it should be made clear from the outset of the project that "group rewriting" or "committee rewriting" is impossible to perform. When a group gathers with the intent of rewriting a document it is rare for the end product to even equal the original in accuracy, precision, and prose quality. Far better that the historian first take the comments of his or her readers, who have now suddenly become critics, and then perform the necessary rewriting in solitude. When considering committee rewriting, it is wise to remember the old saying: *a camel is a horse designed by a committee.*

Aside from this caveat, it is impossible to state ironclad rules about rewriting. One method that is particularly effective, however, is to circulate copies of the manuscript to a predetermined group in the company (to be worked out with the liaison person) and ask each person to read it and mark it up just as if it were a student paper that was being graded. The historian can then conflate suggestions and emendations and perform the rewrite he or she feels is necessary. This completed, the historian can meet with the liaison person and perhaps set up a meeting of all concerned, at which time the historian can explain how he or she arrived at the final manuscript—as amended.

Another observation from the world of journalism states that if one reader discovers major flaws with a story, hundreds of others will also. This is an observation that the writer of the accounting or business history should remember. For this reason, he or she should take seriously what readers have to say. It may be that the historian chooses not to incorporate changes suggested by a reader, but if he or she does not, preparations to

defend such decisions are necessary.

After the manuscript has been completed, the writer will, of course, put it through several revisions in order to produce as professional a product as possible. At that point, he or she might work through the liaison person and request a session with the appropriate people in the company who are willing to read and criticize what has been written. A session such as this, which might evolve into meetings over several days, should be looked at by the historian as an aid to ensuring accuracy, rather than as a fault-finding session. Although they might necessitate extensive rewriting, invaluable information can come from such sessions.   .

BEWARE THE "VANITY" REWRITE

If the historian has done the job properly, the final product should be a manuscript that covers the whole range of the company. He or she has interviewed both executives and employees, and has produced a work that places the company and its operation in the context of the times and also sees it in relation to other companies.

At this point in the project, the historian must be prepared to defend formally what he or she has done, as well as why it has been done the way it has. Although such a defense may be friendly, it should be sufficiently firm that it proves the integrity and accuracy of the study. It should not, however, be so iconoclastic that it closes doors to needed emendations by those in the company who have the knowledge to do so.

The reality is that the most important people in the company are likely to be those who are tough minded and used to giving orders, not taking them. Often self-made, they will view their personal successes as evidence of their business abilities, and they will almost certainly transfer these attitudes to their evaluation of a written history of their companies.

Dealing with the most serious potential problem first, some company readers will likely want to enhance their (or their colleagues') contributions and qualities. They may want parenthetical superlatives such as "the first," "the most," "the originator of," and so on, inserted in conspicuous places. Or they may want extensive, sometimes irrelevant, biographical data included. It is the historian's duty to inform such well meaning commentators that additions such as these weaken the effectiveness of an otherwise objective study. Moreover, unless the

manuscript is scheduled for publication by the company itself, editors in publishing houses are almost certain to delete such addenda. Negotiations at this point require the utmost delicacy. It is not the time for the writer to take umbrage or be unduly defensive; rather it is one for patient explanations and a manifest willingness to receive constructive assistance. By now, all parties should know each other well, and all should be committed to producing the best objective product they can.

Two key questions remain: what if one of the readers in the company edits out something because it casts the company in a negative light; and what if a key individual asks the historian to omit something because it could potentially embarrass the company or some individual involved?

If the historian was hired by the company to write the history, then he or she is in actuality working for the company and the products of the labor belong to the company. If on the other hand the historian is an independent researcher and the finished product belongs to him or her, what must be done when such demands are made?

In the first place, the historian should never have allowed the project to get this far without the company's knowing what kind of story is being written. For this reason, the liaison person should be asked to read and make suggestions at all the major steps along the way. However, one must recognize that there could conceivably be a stumbling block toward the end. There are two things the historian can do if such occurs: one is to negotiate calmly and deliberately, and ultimately probably to compromise, at least to some degree; the other is proceed without the approbation of the company. The latter route may well, however, close doors. Only the historian can make this decision.

PHOTOGRAPHS AND OTHER IMAGES

Accounting and business histories are enhanced by images that supplement the words in the text. With this in mind, the historian early in the project should begin collecting art work. Such materials will come from many sources.

If the organization has its own photography department, it might well have a negative file that the historian can consult. Other images can often be obtained from local, regional, and state public and private historical societies, and from local newspapers' libraries. (Newspapers, however, keep no negative files of pictures they do not publish, and they rarely keep those

they do publish longer than five years.) Another important source of images might be older company members' personal scrapbooks. In addition, local portrait studios should be checked to see if they have pictures of company executives. The historian should remember that a professional photographer will be able to produce usable black and white prints from any clear photograph, and that portrait studios keep negatives on file indefinitely.

Photographs, and permissions to use them, can be expensive. Historical societies usually charge one fee (about ten dollars each) to supply clients with an 8" x 10" black and white photograph, but they also charge another twenty-five to fifty dollars for the rights to publish each one. Perhaps the historian should build in such costs at the beginning of a project. The subject company might be willing to pay such costs.

For the most part, color photographs are usually prohibitively expensive, not to obtain initially, but rather to publish in book form. The historian will probably have to settle for one color picture, the frontispiece or dustjacket, if that.

In the event that monies are available and current photographs are needed, the job of making them should be left to the professional, who will use a 4" x 5" negative format. Color slides, in 35mm size, can be used, but the resulting quality is not as good as that obtained from larger format cameras. Unless the historian is a highly skilled photographer, he or she will not be able to shoot publishable images in either black and white or color. A 35mm camera with a 50 or 55mm lens, whose film will be processed and printed by a local photofinisher will not yield adequate results. The problems are to complicated to explain her, but they revolve around composition theory, image size, focal length of lenses used, filters, fine-grain developers, and the ability to crop and print in the darkroom.

Tables, figures, and charts are also usually needed to highlight data that do not lend themselves to words. If funds are available to pay for such work, places to seek advice, and sometimes even assistance, are graphics directors of local newspapers, artists in local companies large enough to employ them, or commercial art and drafting instructors in local trade schools, high schools, and colleges.

GOING THROUGH THE PRESS

When completed, the history can be published in one of

two ways. If the company has underwritten the project, it may plan also to cover publication costs. On the other hand, the decision may be to seek a commercial publisher or a university press. The historian should understand the time involved in each case.

If the company acts as publisher, a manuscript can be delivered to the print shop and a galley proof received in about four or five weeks. Page proofs will be delivered in an additional two weeks or so, and the book delivered to the company in about another four weeks. (Books bound in hard cover take additional time because the final printed sheets have to be delivered to the bindery, where the book will be held up an additional few weeks.) If an index is planned (as a general rule, there should be an index), it cannot be prepared until the book is in page proof, and the index itself will then have to be proofread in galley and page format. All things considered, if the company acts as publisher, it will take from about eight to twelve weeks to get the final product after the manuscript goes to the printer.

If a printing company rather than a publisher is the choice, it is imperative that a professional editor be added to the project before it goes to the printer. It is difficult for a writer—even two writers—aided only be secretarial help and volunteers, no matter how willing, to produce the kind of book that would be the result of a professional editorial staff at a publishing house. No matter what the choice, the historian must at this point be prepared to select art work, write captions for pictures, read proof, and perhaps even undertake the onerous chore of compiling the index. One other point to remember is that illustrations should have captions that can be understood without making references to the body of the book.

If the historian goes the university press route, he or she should be prepared to wait sometimes as long as a year before the press makes its decision whether to publish the book. Commercial publishers are much faster, the decision time being about four to eight weeks.

University presses are often good publishers for accounting and business histories, but many such presses have house policies against publishing them. National publishing companies almost always work through agents, rarely accepting unsolicited manuscripts.

In the event the book is to underwritten by the company that is its subject, the historian should look for a printing com-

pany that has experience in producing book-length works. Copying services are ill prepared to offer advice and lend assistance in the many details to be attended to as the book goes through the publishing process.

After the manuscript has been completed, the historian, if looking for a university press, should write a detailed (about two pages single spaced) *feeler letter* to the Acquisitions Editor, explaining the project, the length of the manuscript, whether it is on disk or hard copy, and include one or two sample chapters plus a synopsis of the remainder of the work.

CONCLUSION

The major conclusion is obviously that business histories take time to negotiate, research, write, and see through the press. The historian should count on at least two years from start to finish for a small to medium size company, but five years would not be uncommon. An international organization, for example a *Fortune 500* company, might take even more. An "appreciation" book can be written much more quickly, but if the historian wants to tell the story of an organization from the inside out and the outside in, care and time must be invested. The historian has to get to know the organization and its people almost as well as if he or she worked there. Uncounted people must be interviewed, and their words handled with care and accuracy. Work locales from all levels of the company must be visited, notes taken, impression jotted down or recorded on tape. If such an approach is used, the historian should be able to write a history that will stand the test of time, accurately showing future readers what the business under consideration was like. Company histories, "are increasingly disappearing without a trace, as more companies are restructured, sold off, shut down, or otherwise dismantled. And if corporate evolutions aren't recorded, the lessons of the past will be lost" [Bennett, 1988, p. 19].

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